

STUDY GUIDE

BEETLEJUICE

The Musical. The Musical. The Musical.

THE BROADWAY TOUR



PHOTO BY MATTHEW MURPHY



THE
NATIONAL THEATRE
FOUNDATION



For almost 200 years, The National Theatre has occupied a prominent position on Pennsylvania Avenue—"America's Main Street"—and played a central role in the cultural and civic life of Washington, DC. Located a stone's throw from the White House and having the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site as its "front yard," The National Theatre is a historic, cultural presence in our Nation's Capital and the oldest continuously operating enterprise on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The non-profit National Theatre Foundation oversees the historic theatre and serves the DC community through three free outreach programs, *Saturday Morning Live! At The National*, *Community Stage Connections*, and *Teens Behind the Scenes*. These programs provide the greater Washington area with access to high quality performing arts experiences while promoting and employing local and regional artists.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE FOUNDATION

David J. Kitto, Executive Director

Olivia Kosciusko Tritschler, Director of Operations

Jared Strange, Director of Education & Community Programs

Written and Curated by Jordan Ealey, Dramaturg

Designed by Carolyn Donarski

1321 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, DC 20004

www.nationaltheatre.org

©NTF2023, Jordan Ealey. For inquiries about reproduction rights, please contact
The National Theatre Foundation at information@nationaltheatre.org.

DRAMATURGICAL NOTE

How do you take a beloved classic and breathe new life and relevance into it? Ask Eddie Perfect, Scott Brown, and Anthony King, the visionaries behind the stage adaptation of *Beetlejuice*, originally a 1988 film directed by visionary Tim Burton and starring Michael Keaton in the title role. The trio has taken the wacky horror comedy classic with a substantial cult following and injected it with fresh and timely jokes, maintained the pizzazz and eccentricity of the original film, and filled it with all the heart that this moment calls for.

Of the changes made from screen to stage, the most substantial for me is the expansion of Lydia's role. Originally played by the goth queen herself, Winona Ryder, the musical's version of Lydia takes control of her destiny. We watch as she confronts her grief head on and eventually finds acceptance with her new, chosen family, both alive and dead. The so-called "show about death" is not all about killing people or the pain of mourning, but about how those we love never leave us, and we never leave them. Lydia's story, and *Beetlejuice* at large, teach us that the past, present, and future are all deeply connected and the ties that bind us are unbreakable, no matter what world we find ourselves in.



Britney Coleman (Barbara), Will Burton (Adam),
Isabella Esler (Lydia) and Justin Collette
(Beetlejuice)

THE CREATIVE TEAM



Photo by Jan Laidlaw

Eddie Perfect (Music and Lyrics) is an Australian composer, lyricist, playwright, musician, and performer. His works for the stage include *Shane Warne The Musical* (Token Events) for which he won a Helpmann, Greenroom and Victorian Premier's Literary Award; *Vivid White* and *The Beast* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Strictly Ballroom* (Global Creatures); *Songs From The Middle* (with the Brodsky Quartet); and *King Kong Alive On Broadway* (Global Creatures). Eddie's acting credits include *Offspring* (Ten), *South Pacific* (Opera Australia/Lincoln Centre Theatre), *Keating!* (Belvoir), and as a regular presenter on *Playschool*.



Scott Brown (Book) has written with Anthony King since high school. Their two-man musical comedy *Gutenberg! The Musical!* scored Drama Desk, Lortel, and Outer Critics Circle nominations. Scott also writes TV (HBO's "Sharp Objects," Hulu's "Castle Rock," Amazon's "Utopia") and novels (xL, published by Knopf). He won the George Jean Nathan Award for his theatre criticism at *New York Magazine* and spent many happy years at *Entertainment Weekly*.



Anthony King (Book) is an Emmy-nominated writer, producer & performer. Off-Broadway credits include *Gutenberg! The Musical!*, with Scott Brown (Lortel, OCC & Drama Desk Nominations). King's television work includes "Silicon Valley" (HBO), "Broad City" (Comedy Central), "Search Party" (TBS), "Playing House" (USA), "Wet Hot American Summer: First Day of Camp" & "Ten Years Later" (Netflix), "Wrecked" (TBS) and more. He spent many years as the Artistic Director of the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre in NYC and still performs at the UCB Theatres in NY & LA.



Alex Timbers (Director) is an American writer and director and the recipient of Tony, Golden Globe, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, OBIE, Lucille Lortel, and London Evening Standard Awards. He also received the 2019 Drama League Founder's Award for Excellence in Directing and the 2016 Jerome Robbins Award for Directing. He was nominated for a 2020 Grammy Award for his work on *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, for which he also won the 2020 Tony Award for Best Direction of a Musical.



Connor Gallagher (Choreographer) last collaborated with Timbers on *The Robber Bridegroom* (Roundabout Theatre Company, Astaire Award, Calloway nominee). Connor most recently directed a reimagined *Beauty and the Beast* for Disney Creative Entertainment (Brass Ring Award). Recent work includes *Found* (Philadelphia Theatre Company); *Elf* (Kennedy Center); *The Twelve* (Denver Center); *Tangled* (world-premiere); and productions at The Public Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, American Conservatory Theatre, Two River Theatre, Westport Country Playhouse, Goodspeed Opera House, Theatreworks, and Northern Stage. Connor spent a year on Broadway as a dancing rug!

FROM SCREEN

TO STAGE

You might be familiar with the musical, but did you know that Beetlejuice was adapted from a 1988 movie?

Turning beloved films into musicals has become increasingly popular on Broadway. This is due in part to the success of Disney on the musical stage, beginning with *Beauty and the Beast*, which scored eight Tony Award nominations.



OTHER SCREEN TO STAGE ADAPTATIONS



The Lion King (1999)
Broadway's third longest-running show; Grossed more than one billion dollars



Shrek: The Musical (2008)
8 Tony Nominations



Mean Girls (2017)
12 Tony Nominations; Had a pre-Broadway debut at The National Theatre



Some Like It Hot (2022)
13 Tony Nominations; First two openly non-binary actors to receive Tony nominations

What movie would you like to see as a musical?
What style of music would you use? What moments would you want to include?

Use the space below to write about it!

DEALING WITH GRIEF:

LYDIA'S JOURNEY IN BEETLEJUICE

In 1969, Swedish-American psychiatrist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross published a book called *On Death and Dying*. She introduced her model of the five stages of grief, which she suggests most people go through when they are in mourning. While some may go through the five stages in order, grief is unpredictable and affects everyone differently, making each person's journey unique.

KÜBLER-ROSS'S FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF ARE:

1. **Denial** – In this stage, individuals believe the death or other traumatic event they have been forced to confront is somehow not real, and instead cling to a false reality. Some may also isolate themselves and avoid others who have accepted what happened. In *On Death and Dying*, Kübler-Ross states that technological advancements have caused people to become fearful of violent, painful deaths; therefore, in order to protect the psychological mind, they deny the reality of their own inevitable death.
2. **Anger** – When the individual recognizes that denial cannot continue, they become frustrated, especially at those near to them. "Why me?" they might ask themselves "It's not fair!" Some may lash out at loved ones, family members, or medical staff trying to help them. In Kübler-Ross's other book, *Questions and Answers on Death and Dying* (1974), she emphasizes the need for people to do their best to let those who are in this stage feel their feelings and try not to take the anger personally.
3. **Bargaining** – The third stage sees the individual clinging to hope that they can somehow avoid a cause of grief. Someone facing their own death might "negotiate" for an extended life in exchange for a reformed lifestyle. Examples include a person who is terminally ill "negotiating with God" to attend a daughter's wedding or dwelling on the idea that they could "trade their life for someone else's."
4. **Depression** – During the fourth stage, the individual despairs as they reckon with their mortality, the loss of a loved one, or the aftereffects of another tragic event. "I'm so sad," they might say to themselves, "why even bother with anything?" In this state, the individual may grow silent, refuse visitors, lose interest in activities they typically enjoy, and spend much of their time mournful and sullen.
5. **Acceptance** – In this last stage, the individual embraces their own mortality or that of a loved one, faces up to a difficult future, or finally understands the truth of the tragedy they have experienced. People who are dying may precede their surviving loved ones to this state, which typically comes with a calm, retrospective view and a stable emotional state.

ANATOMY OF A SONG: "DEAD MOM"

While funny, whacky, and full of fun, *Beetlejuice* also has a long arc following Lydia, who is dealing with her mother's death and feeling alone. We can maybe see Lydia going through these five stages throughout the musical as she learns to navigate a new normal. Check out the lyrics from the song "Dead Mom" below and see how Lydia goes through some of the different stages of grief. Circle words that indicate the five stages and use the margins to make some notes.

"DEAD MOM"

Hey Mom, Dead Mom
I need a little help here

I'm prob'ly talking to myself here
But Dead Mom, I gotta ask
Are you really in the ground?
Cause I feel you all around me
Are you here, Dead Mom?
Dead Mom

Dead Mom

I'm tired of tryin' to iron out my creases
I'm a bunch of broken pieces
It was you who made me whole

Every day Dad's starin' at me
Like all
"Hurry up, get happy
Move along
Forget about your mom

Cause Daddy's in denial
Daddy doesn't wanna feel

He wants me to smile
And clap like a performing seal
Ignored it for a while
But Daddy's lost his mind for real
You won't believe the mess that we've become

You're my home
My destination
And I'm your clone
Your strange creation
You held my hand
And life came easy
Now jokes don't land
And no one sees me
Nothing seems to fit



"DEAD MOM" CONT.

Mama, is this it?
Are you receiving?
I want something to believe in
Or I'm done
Take me where my soul can run
Or I'll be in my bedroom
Wake me when I'm twenty-one

Daddy's moving forward
Daddy didn't lose a mom

Mama won't you send a sign?
I'm running out of hope
and time
A plague of mice, a lightning strike
Or drop a nuclear bomb
No more playing Daddy's game
I'll go insane if things don't change

Whatever it takes to make him say your name



Watch Sophie Anne Caruso (the original Lydia on Broadway) sing "Dead Mom."



Can you identify the Five Stages of Grief in *Beetlejuice*?
What other songs in the show confront grief?

ALLOW US TO RE-INTRODUCE

BEETLEJUICE

The Musical. The Musical. The Musical.

After getting its start at The National Theatre back in 2018, *Beetlejuice* struggled to find its audience. But its emergence on Broadway after years of the COVID-19 pandemic has given the production new life. This is all to say...never give up! Check out this article about *Beetlejuice*'s triumphant return to The National Theatre, originally published in the [The Washington Post](#)

THEATER & DANCE

AFTER A SCARE IN D.C., 'BEETLEJUICE' FOUND A SECOND LIFE ON BROADWAY

The touring production of the retooled, Tony-nominated show comes to the National Theatre

By Thomas Floyd, May 16, 2023

Composer Eddie Perfect was strolling into "Beetlejuice's" opening night after-party in November 2018, as the musical staging of the beloved horror-comedy movie premiered at D.C.'s National Theatre, when The Washington Post's review popped up on his phone and provided quite the fright.

"The new 'Beetlejuice' musical," the headline read, "is overcaffeinated, overstuffed and virtually charmless."

"I mean, it was a total pan," Perfect says. "I remember walking in and going, 'This is really, really bad,' and not really knowing how to process that."

Perfect and "Beetlejuice" book writers Anthony King and Scott Brown each bring up Peter Marks's review as a pivotal point in the show's trajectory but add that exit polling, producers' notes and live audience reactions also hinted that the musical required a reincarnation before its Broadway premiere in April 2019.

Collaborating with director Alex Timbers, the creators promptly embarked on a five-month odyssey of script rewrites, score updates and tonal tweaks.

By the time "Beetlejuice" began haunting the Winter Garden Theatre, the changes had paid off: The critical reception improved, eight Tony nominations ensued and

Justin Collette, center, surrounded by members of the touring company, plays the ghostly title character in "Beetlejuice" at the National Theatre.



the show ran on Broadway for 679 performances before closing earlier this year. Now, "Beetlejuice" is revisiting its roots as the touring production arrives to spook audiences at the National Theatre through May 28.

"That's what an out-of-town tryout is meant to do," King says. "You learn what you have and how it's not connecting, and I think it was exciting afterwards to be able to rip up all the carpet and come out with something that we loved much more than what we had when we went to D.C."

The "Beetlejuice" musical retains the narrative skeleton of Tim Burton's 1988 film: Still mourning her mother's death, goth girl Lydia and her family move into a house haunted by the Maitlands, a recently deceased couple who summon the titular ghoul in hopes of scaring away their home's new inhabitants.

Although Michael Keaton's Beetlejuice had only 17 minutes of screen time in the film, the musical's creative team decided to center the devious demon onstage and reimagine him as a fourth-wall-breaking emcee. Reflecting on the D.C. production, Brown says the writers were chasing a "'Book of Mormon' idea of outrageousness" while overloading the character (as originally played by Alex Brightman) with crass jokes and brazen meta-humor.

"We were the trained rat with the red button that gives you the sugar, hitting that button over and over again because it always got a reaction," Brown says. "There was a lot of anxiety about just filling the space and pumping the energy. It's a pretty easy mistake to make in a lot of ways, and the correction did not really come until the hammer came down in that review."

On Broadway, the R-rated shtick gave way to a PG-13 tenor. One particularly notorious gag, in which a roasted pig's genitalia sprang to life, was trimmed. ("We cut it off the pig, and we hung it on a plaque above the underpass in the Winter Garden Theatre," Perfect says. "I always felt sad about that.") Once the show scaled back the bombast, its themes of processing grief and found family struck a clearer chord.

Perfect, meanwhile, used the score to develop the Maitlands into more compelling characters. Whereas the D.C. run featured a somber ballad from the duo



From left, Isabella Esler, Will Burton and Britney Coleman in "Beetlejuice."

called "The Children We Didn't Have," which heavily implied they had experienced a miscarriage, that song was cut in favor of "Barbara 2.0," an upbeat anthem of afterlife transformation that Perfect wrote during technical rehearsals on Broadway.

"Miscarriage is not great fun in a musical comedy," Perfect says. "So we learned that, and we cut their ballad in the second act in order to give them something that had drive behind it."

Another casualty of the D.C.-to-Broadway transition: "Everything Is Kinda Meh," a satirical song performed by a spectral boy band when Lydia ventures to the Netherworld. While the writers found the tune inherently amusing, its place in the plot puzzled many theatergoers.

As Brown astutely observes, "It turns out a rule of theater is you can't send the audience to hell in the second act and there's a dead boy band waiting for them." In that number's place, "Beetlejuice" now features the tango tune "What I Know Now" as performed by Miss Argentina, a ghostly character from the film who rued taking her own life (and made only a brief appearance in the D.C. production).

"The journey of Miss Argentina, who people love from the movie, is this sense that she chose a way out of life and regrets it," King says. "That felt like it resonated

and echoed off of Lydia, who has chosen to go to the Netherworld to basically choose not to live because she misses her mom.”

Ultimately, Perfect—who credits his wife for the idea to write the Miss Argentina number—got a Tony nomination for best score. The “Beetlejuice” record, meanwhile, was the third-most-streamed cast album of 2019, behind “Hamilton” and “Dear Evan Hansen.” Such validation was a relief to the Australian composer, who recalls an audience survey from D.C. in which patrons were asked to identify the most memorable songs from the show and overwhelmingly voted for “Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)” and “Jump in the Line (Shake, Señora)” —two tunes featured in the film that, notably, were not penned by Perfect.

“Then the graph just dropped for miles and miles, and down at the bottom was this little row of tiny lines that were all my songs,” Perfect says. “I was like, ‘Everyone hates the

score. I’m never going to work outside of Australia again.’ So the fact that the score worked, that people were getting on YouTube and singing the songs, it just felt like a life preserver had been tossed to me.”

King and Brown also earned a Tony nod for best book, and the show made the cut for best musical (losing to “Hadestown”). After cosplaying patrons showed up in movie-inspired costumes for the first few weeks of the Broadway run, King says, those outfits were soon swapped out for get-ups from the musical as fans connected with “Beetlejuice’s” merry tale of the macabre.

“The main thing we wanted to get at with this show is that we as a culture do not really know how to talk about grief,” King says. “We wanted to make a show that was about that. That has really resonated with a lot of people, and that just feels really satisfying. And I don’t know if the D.C. version of the show would have had that resonance.”

From left, Danielle Marie Gonzalez as Miss Argentina, Isabella Esler as Lydia and Jesse Sharp as Charles in “Beetlejuice.”



Photo by Matthew Murphy, 2022

MORE ON BEETLEJUICE

